



## **Sign Language Recognition in the World And related topics**

Firstly I would like to begin stating that this process is about, as Padden and Humphries (1988) have already stated, using the same convention proposed by James Woodward in 1972, Deaf people, where the term in lower case “d” deaf indicates people with hearing loss and with the upper case “D” Deaf people that belong to a community (the Deaf community), users of Sign Language and that have their own identity and culture.

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI), leaves the part regarding Europe to the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli), as we closely collaborate with them with regards to this region.

From an international point of view the following countries are a sample of countries that have recognized their National Signed Language (or languages) as official languages of the country. Some have Constitutional recognition and others have official government recognition and others have legislation that covers the provision in specific domains.

### **The Following Countries has a Constitutional recognition of Sign Language:**

#### **World:**

#### **Brazil (Constitutional recognition)**

The [Brazilian Sign Language \(LIBRAS\)](#) was legally recognized in [2002](#);[\[3\]](#) the law was [regulated](#) in [2005](#).[\[4\]](#) The language must be taught as a part of the

education and [speech and language pathology](#) curricula. LIBRAS teachers, instructors and translators are recognized professionals. Schools and health services must provide access ("[include](#)") to deaf people.

### **Ecuador (Constitutional recognition)**

### **New Zealand (Constitutional Recognition)**

[New Zealand Sign Language](#) became the third official language of [New Zealand](#) in April 2006, joining [Māori](#) and [English](#) when the bill was passed in the New Zealand Parliament on April 6, 2006.

### **South Africa (Constitutional Recognition)**

### **Uganda (Constitutional Recognition)**

On October 8, 1995, [Uganda](#)'s national sign language was recognised in the country's new [constitution](#), making [Uganda Sign Language](#) one of the few constitutionally recognised sign languages in the world ([WFD News](#), April 1996). A Deaf signer (27-year-old [Alex Ndeezi](#)) was elected to [parliament](#) in 1996.

### **Venezuela (Constitutional Recognition)**

[Venezuelan Sign Language](#) was recognised in the country's [constitution](#) on November 12, 1999.

### **Europe:**

Austria (2005); Czech republic (1998); Finland 1995); Portugal 1997); Slovakian Republic 1995); Spain (2007)

### **The following countries have the language recognized by their Governments:**

#### **World:**

Cuba and Mauritius

#### **Europe:**

United Kingdom.

As Italy is one of the many countries of the world that has Signed the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and its Protocol on the same date and Ratified them on the 15<sup>th</sup> May

2009. It is important to remind as part of such document the following articles states:

### **Article 2: Definitions**

- Communication is distinguished from language.
- “‘Language’ includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non spoken languages.”

### **Article 3: General Principles**

- “Full and effective participation and inclusion in society.”
- “Respect for difference and acceptance of person with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity.”
- “Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.”

### **Considerations**

- The general principle of the convention aims for inclusion but it also allows for individual expressions of identity. The convention does not endorse the ‘changing’ of children to make them ‘normal’.
- Diversity of humankind is emphasised.

### **Article 9: Accessibility**

- (e) “Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries including ... professional sign language interpreters...”

### **Considerations**

- The role of an ‘interpreter’ can not be watered down into other para-professional occupations.
- WFD and WASLI have already worked together to define what a ‘professional sign language interpreter’ is.

### **Article 10: Right to life**

- “States parties reaffirm that every human being has the inherent right to life and shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.”

### **Considerations**

Challenges any attempt to genetically manipulate embryos or through processes of fertilisation to select a specific embryos or gametes rather than others (hearing rather than deaf).

### **Article 21: Freedom of Expression**

- “Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official

interactions.”

- “Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.”

### **Considerations**

- The use of sign language should be promoted, i.e. deaf children are empowered to use sign language.
- All official communication should be provided in sign language.

### **Article 24: Education**

- “Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community.”
- “Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.”

### **Considerations**

- The teaching of sign language to deaf children to become an expected norm.
- Some children will require exposure to other forms of communication. The two points should not be confused as they are both separate items i.e. all deaf children to learn sign language AND provided with appropriate means for communication to facilitate education.

### **Article 24: Still on Education**

- “In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.”

### **Consideration**

- More Deaf people, fluent in sign language, should become available to be teaching deaf children.

### **Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport**

- (1) “States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.”

### **Consideration**

- More funding required for the various organizations of disabled/Deaf people or that represent disability/Deaf arts.

### **Article 30**

- (4) “Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.”

### **Consideration**

- Sign language and Deaf culture is not only promoted but developed further.

**Article 33** explains that States must set up national focal points governments in order to **monitor implementation of the Convention's precepts**.

States must also set up some sort of **independent monitoring mechanisms** – which usually takes the form of an independent national human rights institution. The full participation of civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations is essential in the national monitoring and implementation process.

International monitoring is achieved via the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Conference of States Parties.

**The Conference of States Parties** is made up of signatories to the Convention, and has the authority to consider any matter with regard to implementation of the Convention.

**The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** will have an eventual membership of 18 experts. States Parties will provide reports to the Committee every two years after the Convention has entered into force. The reports will provide a comprehensive explanation on the progress made towards implementation of the Convention.

It is therefore obvious that Italy as a Signatory of such Convention will have to submit a report and justify why it has yet to implement the above mentioned articles.

Regards

Marco Nardi

WASLI European Regional Representative

[Europe@wasli.com](mailto:Europe@wasli.com)

**References:**

Padden C. and Humphries T. (1988) "Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture", Harvard University Press (USA)

Walker J. (2010) "UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", Our Space Meeting, University of Sussex, Brighton (UK)

Woodward J. (1972) "Implications for sociolinguistic research among the deaf". *Sign Language Studies* 1, 1-7. (USA)

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal\\_recognition\\_of\\_sign\\_languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_recognition_of_sign_languages)

[signlanguagerecognition.wordpress.com](http://signlanguagerecognition.wordpress.com)

[www.eud.eu/EUD\\_Report-i-230.html](http://www.eud.eu/EUD_Report-i-230.html)

[www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?id=166](http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?id=166)

[www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf)

[www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=18&pid=157](http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=18&pid=157)